



**Ripened  
by human  
determination**

**70 years of The Vegan Society**



The Vegan Society had  
a difficult birth and has  
never been rich.

The full story would fill  
a book.

**Donald Watson**

Interview with 'Vegetarians in Paradise'  
11<sup>th</sup> August 2004

## Introduction

November 2014 sees The Vegan Society celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To mark this special milestone, staff and volunteers have been exploring the historical archives stored at Donald Watson House in Birmingham, looking back to our past in order to tell the fascinating story of The Vegan Society. Summarising our achievements since November 1944, this eBook presents a truly great tale of human determination, paving the way for a vegan future.

In the past three years, the society has experienced unprecedented, positive interest in the vegan diet, and a membership increase of 20%. Veganism is enjoying a period of media interest in the UK and US press as well as in other parts of Europe, unlike anything it has known before.

This was first noticed at the beginning of 2013 when we saw an increase in the number of people signing up to our online pledge to go vegan for a week or a month. In the first three months of 2013, the number was up 40% worldwide (and 26% in the UK). Although the numbers of participants were still relatively small, it has to be remembered that most people wanting to try to be vegan will not sign up to an online support scheme, so our results were likely to be just an indication of the growth in interest. Despite the backdrop of the British horsemeat scandal, only three people mentioned this as the reason for taking the pledge. We knew there had to be something else going on.

There were also other signs of a burgeoning interest in the vegan diet and lifestyle. Anjali Sareen writing in the Huffington Post<sup>1</sup> noted that there was evidence from Google trends statistics for both the UK and worldwide showing an increase of over 30% in the number of searches for the word 'vegan' in the past two years. In March 2013, a new record was set for the highest ever number of searches for the word 'vegan'.

Organisers of the vegan consumer diet and lifestyle exhibition, VegfestUK, held on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 in Brighton saw a 44% rise in footfall from the previous year – from 5,000 to 7,200 visitors. The number of cookery books sold by online retailer Amazon with 'vegan' in the title also increased from 145 books in 2011 to 255 books in 2012 and 385 in 2013, demonstrating a fast-growing market for animal-free recipes.

Our press release pointing these trends out gained little publicity at the time but by the end of 2013, the national and international press was covering veganism more regularly and more positively than in the past, including ample mentions of The Vegan Society. Some of this was admittedly more about the plant-based diet than veganism, for example, the popularity of Mark Bittman's book *Vegan Before 6* and the well-publicised interest in plant-based diets by celebrities Beyoncé and Jay-Z at the end of 2013. Whichever way you look at it, the profile of veganism is on the rise; the diet now being presented – on the whole – as something aspirational and healthy. This was a sudden change for the mainstream media, who had previously often portrayed vegans and vegan diets negatively. By the end of 2013, every national newspaper in the UK had run articles on the vegan diet and BBC Radio 4's prestigious Food Programme had broadcast a programme entitled *The New Vegans*. The Vegan Society was suddenly being asked to comment on relevant issues where once we would not have been contacted. By the end of the year, Forbes.com, a leading business website in the US, had named high-end vegan dining as top of its "food trends of 2013". All this in fewer than 70 years since the word 'vegan' was coined by the founding members of The Vegan Society.

## So how did we get here?

### In the beginning

Veganism has had a longer history than you might imagine. It could be said that there have always been vegans – people who have chosen to live as far as possible without the use of animal products. Often this was for religious or spiritual reasons. In more recent times, the original use of the word ‘vegetarian’ (in the 1830s) indicated a person who did not eat any animal products at all and who lived on a vegan and predominantly raw food diet. This early ‘vegetarianism’ extended to clothing and other aspects of life and was comparable to the idea of veganism that was established in 1944 when The Vegan Society was born<sup>2</sup>. The word would appear to have been first used by people associated with the Alcott House Concordium at Ham Common, a school and community founded by the mystic James Pierrepont Greaves in 1838. The word ‘vegetarian’ only came to indicate a diet that included eggs and dairy products after the formation of The Vegetarian Society in 1847<sup>3</sup>, but although The Vegetarian Society permitted members to eat eggs and dairy products, the definition was not clear cut. As late as 1886, Anna Bonus Kingsford, a vice president of the London Vegetarian Society, was able to say that she was not a vegetarian because “during the whole of that period I have used such animal produce as butter, cheese, eggs, and milk”.<sup>4</sup>

The first animal product free cookery book, *Kitchen Philosophy for Vegetarians* was published in England in 1849 by William Horsell of London. A review of the book claimed that “butter and eggs are excluded” making it the first known ‘vegan’ cookery book.<sup>5</sup> William Horsell was a vegetarian and the owner of the water cure establishment in Ramsgate where the meeting to found The Vegetarian Society took place in 1847.

At the establishment of The Vegetarian Society in 1847 the definition of the diet included eggs and dairy products – both then and now – to accommodate some of those involved in the formation of the society who ate those products.

However, from 1909 to 1912 there was a lively discussion in the pages of The Vegetarian Society’s journal, *The Vegetarian Messenger*, about whether vegetarians should eat eggs and dairy products. This correspondence was revived again after World War I and it would eventually lead to the establishment of the world’s first vegan society in 1944.<sup>6</sup> Both before and after World War I, The Vegetarian Society “appeared to be moving towards what would later be called a vegan diet”<sup>7</sup>. The editor of *The Vegetarian Messenger* wrote in 1923:

**We feel that the ideal position for vegetarians is abstinence from animal products, and that most of us are, like other reformers, in a transitional stage**<sup>8</sup>

In 1935, the editor noted:

**The question as to whether dairy products should be used by vegetarians becomes more pressing year by year.**<sup>9</sup>

The editor invited correspondence from those living on a dairy-free diet and published responses. The first person quoted was Mr Donald Watson of Leicester – who would later found The Vegan Society. Watson describes how he became a vegetarian at 16, and remained so for seven years, but then “read some facts in the MESSENGER re the partial responsibility which consumers of dairy produce hold.” Watson goes on to say:

**I tried it and found it not at all difficult to make a very varied, appetizing, and in every way satisfactory, dietary from the wide variety of health foods which are to be had everywhere nowadays.**<sup>10</sup>

At the time of writing, Watson was following a raw food diet:

**Being a person who believes that progress is a thing that depends more upon experiment than anything else, I decided early this year to try what must, I think, be the last of all vegetarian**

**experiments, that is, to live exclusively on raw fruit ... My diet now consists of nuts (usually ground), Canary bananas, apples and dates.<sup>11</sup>**

In December 1943, Watson gave a talk to The Vegetarian Society on vegetarianism and the use of dairy products. A summary was published in The Vegetarian Messenger in March 1944. In August, Watson and Elsie Shrigley discussed forming a sub-group of non-dairy vegetarians within The Vegetarian Society. The Vegetarian Society eventually refused to give space in its journal over to the proposed sub-group of non-dairy-vegetarians. Although there was sympathy from the committee of The Vegetarian Society for the idea of this group and the position taken by the non-dairy-vegetarians, The Vegetarian Society felt that “the full energies of the Society must continue to be applied to the task of abolishing flesh-eating”.<sup>12</sup> It was suggested that the non-dairy-vegetarians should form a separate organisation. Early in November 1944, Elsie Shrigley, Donald Watson, and four others met at the Attic Club in Holborn, London to discuss the founding of a new organisation. According to Elsie Shrigley, the day of the founding meeting was “a Sunday, with sunshine and a blue sky – an auspicious day for the birth of an idealistic movement”.

It is interesting to note that although the founding of The Vegan Society is celebrated each year by The Vegan Society on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, the actual date when the society was founded is not known. The first quarterly magazine of the new society was dated the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, and it was the single-handed production of Donald Watson, who was at that time a teacher of woodwork. It seems likely that the founding meeting took place on either the 5<sup>th</sup> or the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. Given the very labour intensive process to produce the first issue of Vegan News (involving typing the newsletter, duplicating each page a number of times on a stencil duplicator, and stapling pages together by hand – Watson later described it as taking him “a whole night”<sup>13</sup> to assemble it) it seems probable that The Vegan Society was

founded on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1944.

Writing in that first issue of Vegan News, Watson says that it is a common criticism that the time is not yet ripe for the vegan reform. He responds:

**Can time ever be ripe for any reform unless it is ripened by human determination? Did Wilberforce wait for the ‘ripening’ of time before he commenced his fight against slavery? Did Edwin Chadwick, Lord Shaftesbury, and Charles Kingsley wait for such a non-existent moment before trying to convince the great dead weight of public opinion that clean water and bathrooms would be an improvement? If they had declared their intention to poison everybody the opposition they met could hardly have been greater. There is an obvious danger in leaving the fulfilment of our ideals to posterity, for posterity may not have our ideals. Evolution can be retrogressive as well as progressive, indeed there seems always to be a strong gravitation the wrong way unless existing standards are guarded and new visions honoured. For this reason we have formed our Group, the first of its kind, we believe, in this or any other country.<sup>14</sup>**

What the new society should call itself was an issue addressed in the first newsletter. “Non-dairy vegetarians” was considered too long and cumbersome. It was also felt to be too negative, and it did not make clear the opposition to eggs as food. Watson and his wife Dorothy came up with the word ‘vegan’ and suggested that the membership might choose to adopt it and become vegans. Members were invited to suggest other names and Watson recalls several suggestions such as ‘dairyban’, ‘vitan’, ‘benevore’, ‘sanivore’, and ‘beaumangeur’, but he seems to have had the final say and “settled for [his] own word” noting that “no-one has tried to improve it”.<sup>15</sup> Watson, as a secretary of a local vegetarian society, knew the virtue of having a short name to type or write. Watson later says that the word ‘vegan’ was created from the first and last

letters of 'vegetarian' because the diet grew out of vegetarianism and was seen as its natural conclusion. The coining of the word 'vegan' is usually credited to Donald Watson or to a combined effort by Donald and his wife Dorothy. However, Watson credits founding member Mr G. A. Henderson and his wife Fay K. Henderson as the source of the idea for the word 'vegan'. Fay K. Henderson later wrote the first cookery book with 'vegan' in the title. Before the appearance of the first issue of the newsletter, Mr and Mrs Henderson had suggested the name 'Allvega' with 'Allvegan' as the title of the magazine. It was from this that the name 'vegan' was taken by Watson. Watson notes that the Hendersons had written to say that they approved of the shorter title.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that the word 'vega' was already in use in vegetarian circles and had been for some time. From 1934, one of the best known London vegetarian restaurants was the Vega (on the corner of Panton and Whitcomb Streets). It was opened by Walter and Jenny Fleiss who had previously owned the Vega restaurant in Hohe Strasse in Cologne and had been forced to flee Germany when Walter learned he was No.17 on the Gestapo list. The Hendersons, and indeed all vegetarians of the period would have been aware of the Vega, which was one of the foremost vegetarian restaurants of its time and which was frequented by many well-known vegetarians such as Sir Stafford Cripps. It seems likely that the Vega is the inspiration for their suggested name. The Fleisses authored a much reprinted cookery book published by Penguin called *Modern Vegetarian Cookery*.<sup>17</sup>

Following the meeting at the Attic Club to found The Vegan Society a meeting was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April in London. The location is not given, but it may have been held at the Attic Club again. The first committee of the society contained members from Manchester and Devon as well as those closer to London such as Bromley and West Byfleet. The difficulties and cost of travel in wartime Britain would have prevented the early

committee from meeting frequently. It seems likely that meetings continued for a time at the Attic Club as the London Group of The Vegan Society was formed there on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July with 35 people attending the meeting. Watson, writing in *The Vegan* in summer 1988 reflected that the members were:

**few in number and widely dispersed, and all of us were heavily involved in our own careers. We had no funds, no private transport – apart from bicycles, no precedents to work on, no office, little experience in public speaking, and none in publishing. The war was ending, food rationing was at its most severe and was to continue for another seven years.**<sup>18</sup>

Watson asks himself why they chose to found the society then of all times:

**Perhaps it seemed to us a fitting antidote to the sickening experience of war, and a reminder that we should be doing more about the other holocaust that goes on all the time. Or perhaps it was that we were conscious of a remarkable omission in all previous vegetarian literature – namely, that though nature provides us with lots of examples of carnivores and vegetarians it provides us with no examples of lacto-carnivores or lacto-vegetarians. Such groups are freaks and only made possible by man's capacity to exploit the reproductive functions of other species. This, we thought, could not be right either dietetically or ethically. It was certainly wrong aesthetically, and we could conceive of no spectacle more bizarre than that of a grown man attached at his meal-times to the udder of a cow.**<sup>19</sup>

The first newsletter records that there are just 25 members of The Vegan Society. Watson recalled limiting the number of people who subscribed to the newsletter for five shillings a year to 500 people because he could not cope with a larger number. He had to feed 6,000 sheets of paper into a stencil duplicator by hand.

## Vegan food limitations in war and peace time

There was much optimism among the founders of The Vegan Society about the potential of this new movement. It is difficult in the face of this to remember that the society was founded in war time – although towards the end of the war, and arguably the end would have been in sight by this time. It was not until the third newsletter that the war was mentioned. Watson had contacted the Ministry to request that vegans be given a fat ration suitable for vegans as an alternative to butter and lard rations. He also requested additional points to enable vegans to buy other foods that were in limited supply, such as lentils and dried fruits in place of the meat, cheese, milk and egg coupons that they did not use. Vegans could register as vegetarians but the vegetarian rations were of no use to vegans as they were entirely animal foods such as an additional egg per week and 12oz of cheese. Watson's request on behalf of The Vegan Society was refused because the ministry took the view that the foods the society requested were not the nutritional equivalents of the foods that they proposed to surrender. Despite responding and requesting a meeting of a delegation of vegans with the minister (which was quite bluntly refused) a vegan ration was never supplied and Watson felt that this was due to the small size of the membership and a discriminatory practice.

At this point, Watson claims a membership of 35. However, by November 1945, the Vegan News was being distributed to 500 subscribers. In spring 1946, the first issue of The Vegan magazine was published. Donald Watson continued in the role of secretary and editor of The Vegan until the AGM in autumn 1946 when Watson resigns from these roles due to the "pressure of his professional work". Watson is elected the society's first 'President' and its first Life Member.

In the early years, the society was entirely operated by its committee members who were all volunteers. Watson recalled the early days of

the society as creating a greater response than he anticipated:

[L]etters poured in at twenty or thirty a day. Many were deeply philosophical and called for long answers. Many did not contain a stamp for reply, which added to the difficulties of a conscientious objector who for three years had been trying to live on a reduced salary of £2 a week! I was working single-handed and frequently never went to bed.<sup>20</sup>

The first member of staff, a full-time paid secretary, was appointed in 1947 at a salary of £250 a year to cope with the volume of work. Mr G Allan Henderson, the then treasurer of the society, took up the role.

Volunteers have always had a key role to play in the society's history. Although the society has more paid staff today the volume of opportunities to promote veganism continues to grow too and volunteers are still a very valuable resource. Some assist staff at the office in roles that would not have been unfamiliar to the society's early volunteers. Others are involved in projects that use their specialist skills and they may undertake work for the society remotely, wherever they happen to live in the world. A good example of this is volunteer translators. Today, the society has a volunteer bank of several hundred people all over the world to call upon.

In the early decades of the society, the emphasis of the committee was not on why one should be vegan but how to be vegan. The society's supporters already agreed the why but the key difficulties for vegans were practical ones such as the social problems of not eating what other people ate, and the problem of obtaining particular foods, such as plant milks or other items such as shoes. From its earliest days, the society focussed on researching which foods were suitable for a vegan diet and creating 'trade lists'. Another great concern was the need for a ready-made plant milk. Early members made their own 'milks' from

nuts. Even this was not a simple matter. In 1952, when rationing still continued, the society wrote “an open letter to the minister of food” in *The Vegan* (Summer 1952 No.2 Vol. VIII) requesting different rations to replace animal foods and particularly that they should be allowed “nuts at much reduced prices in place of milk from nuts, which are far too costly for us just now”. A call in the spring 1956 issue of *The Vegan* for a vegan milk association to research, manufacture, and market a non-animal milk was made by Leslie J Cross. This led to the creation of the Plantmilk Society in June 1956. When UK food companies refused to produce a vegetable milk because they saw insufficient demand and attempts to import an American powdered soya milk failed, the Plantmilk Society set up its own company, Plantmilk Ltd, in 1965 with Leslie Cross as its first full-time employee. This later became Plamil (the first three letters of “plant” and the first three letters of “milk”) which continues to this day.

## Vegan for the animals

The suffering and slaughter of animals was the starting point for the creation of The Vegan Society. Although the vegan diet was defined early on it was as late as 1949 before Leslie J Cross pointed out that the society lacked a definition of veganism and he suggested “[t]he principle of the emancipation of animals from exploitation by man”.<sup>21</sup> This is later clarified as “to seek an end to the use of animals by man for food, commodities, work, hunting, vivisection, and by all other uses involving exploitation of animal life by man”.<sup>22</sup>

When the society became a registered charity in 1979, the Memorandum and Articles of Association defined “veganism” as:

**[...] a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free**

## alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment.

In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.

The current vision of the society is a world in which humans do not exploit other animals. Working towards this vision, our mission is to make veganism an easily adopted and widely recognised approach to reducing animal and human suffering and environmental damage by means of meaningful, peaceful and factual dialogue with individuals, organisations and companies.

Peaceful and factual dialogue has always prevailed in the society, which sets the organisation apart from some grassroots groups using different tactics. From the beginning, Donald Watson clearly set out his beliefs, in a respectful but firm manner, while also inviting constructive comments.

In his address to the International Vegetarian Congress in 1947, Donald Watson remarks:

**The vegan believes there is nothing in the idea of vegetarianism so long as this regrettable practice of eating more dairy produce continues. Indeed the use of milk must be a greater crime than the use of flesh-foods, since after all the exploitation of motherhood and calf killing the cow must face the slaughter-house. Thus the dairy cow suffers far more than the bullock taken from the field and slaughtered.**<sup>23</sup>

Early vegans were well aware of the practical issues faced by advocating a humane diet. The spring 1947 issue of *The Vegan* carries reports on a letter received by the editor, Fay K. Henderson, from Mrs M.W. Austen Goodman, Angherad, Corwen, Merioneth who ran her own farm in Wales. She produced oats, wheat and dairy produce and was a longstanding vegetarian, “although not yet a practising Vegan”, who took



seriously the tragic slaughter of calves. The editor calls for those who have experience or an interest in the matter to submit constructive comments and suggestions:

**Unfortunately milk is about the only produce that consistently pay on a mixed farm, and the wages have to come from somewhere. If a farm is not run conventionally, there is a risk of it being classed as inefficient by the W.E.A.C. [War Agricultural Executive Committee], who have the legal right to take it over, even if it has been a family homestead for generations. It is advisable to try to formulate some workable scheme for those who wish to live in the country and produce food by natural methods.<sup>24</sup>**

Another example of the society's concern for sentient life is the debate in the early years regarding the use of honey by vegans. The society's members did not eat dairy products or eggs but some ate honey. The matter of whether to exclude honey from the vegan diet was held over until a committee meeting in 1945. The decision was taken to exclude it from the vegan diet as it was the product of an insect; further investigation by committee members of the main producers of honey confirmed that it was never simply an over-supply but that all the honey is taken from the hive and a substitute solution supplied. It was felt that honey should be excluded for consistency and because veganism was an attempt to live without exploiting other sentient beings. The topic re-appears in the 1970s. The 1974 AGM voted that the use of honey need not be a bar to full membership since "home production of honey need not involve cruelty and bees are essential to fruit production".<sup>25</sup> Not all members were comfortable with this decision and it was eventually reversed at an EGM of 1988. The society has returned to its roots and full members are required not to eat any animal products including the produce of insects such as honey, shellac, royal jelly etc. It may, however, go some way to

explaining why vegans are still sometimes asked whether they eat honey. Today, the vast majority of our members are vegan for the animals, followed by environmental reasons, and then health.

## Vegan for people

Contrary to the belief that those concerned with animal protection or animal rights are more concerned about animals than people, vegans have always promoted the value of veganism to human animals too. Vegans have emphasised the potential of the vegan diet to resolve food supply issues, the foolishness of 'cycling' our food through animals instead of eating plant food directly and the value of veganism to global food security. Different terms may have been used in earlier decades but the concepts were in place from the society's earliest days.

Early Vegan Society members were widely derided and warned that their health would suffer if they insisted on their extreme dietary practices. Watson gave 'An Address on Veganism' at the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Vegetarian Union held at Stonehouse in Gloucestershire on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1947. Watson considers that improvements in health and living conditions have not greatly eradicated disease:

**Medical science has proved itself incapable of checking, still less reversing, this great forward arch towards human destruction, so it rests with the layman to try to save himself as best he can by formulating more accurate deductions and specifying a more intelligent approach to the problem.<sup>26</sup>**

The vegan, he says, believes that:

**the rotting of the human body, which is marked by the death rates for certain diseases almost doubling in a generation, is caused chiefly by wrong nutrition. Even when all other conditions are good the health of the strongest wild animal can soon be brought down by depriving the creature of its natural food. In**

our quest for natural food we ally ourselves with those who advocate that crops should be grown on naturally fertilised soil, and with those who denounce devitalised foods. We believe there is too much processing; too much tearing asunder of the proportions existing in whole foods. We feel also that the destructive effect of heat upon food must receive more consideration, and that only when these various approaches are combined with the idea of eliminating animal food will the diet problem be solved. The life work of Dr. Bircher Benner, and others, has revealed that raw vegetable food, properly selected, is the most potent healing factor that exists.<sup>27</sup>

Watson commented in more than one interview that he, and the society, had outlived their critics: "Speaking from my old age, I sometimes think I've outlived my critics, and I can't remember, the last time that I encountered one."<sup>28</sup>

When The Vegan Society was founded Vitamin B12 had not been discovered. The name B12 was only proposed in 1948 for what was previously called 'anti-pernicious anaemia factor'.<sup>29</sup> By the 1950s, some vegans were becoming ill. Writing in the *Vegetarian News*, the journal of the London Vegetarian Society, in spring 1952, Dr C.V. Pink records that in the course of his work in the last ten years:

**I have seen patients whose health has broken down after following the vegan diet for a period of five to fifteen years. Most often the trouble seems to begin after six to eight years".<sup>30</sup>**

He describes symptoms both psychological and physical including irritability and depression, muscular weakness, fatigue, backache and numbness or tingling of hands and feet. He notes "this last indicates damage to the nervous system". He concludes that there are several possibilities:

**1 Shortage of protein or of essential amino-acids in protein.**

**2 Shortage of vitamin B12 or some other essential element in the human dietary.**

**3 A difference in the ability of the individual to thrive on the same diet.**

To readers today, it is poignant to read this description and know that foods fortified with Vitamin B12 or B12 tablets could have resolved the problems. Some of these symptoms, such as pins and needles in the hands and feet, are now seen as classic symptoms of Vitamin B12 deficiency. Although theories on the necessity of B12 and whether or not a good dietary source of B12 can be found in plant foods have been keenly debated over the years The Vegan Society is very clear in its advice today that all vegans need to ensure an adequate supply of vitamin B12 in their diets either via fortified foods such as plant milks, yeast extracts and breakfast cereals or via a vitamin supplement. In recent years a former trustee, Stephen Walsh, the author of a book on vegan nutrition published by The Vegan Society, has developed with a vitamin manufacturer a Vegan Society multi-vitamin, VEG1, which contains vitamins B12, D, B6 and B2 as well as Folic Acid, Selenium and Iodine. The formulation is reviewed regularly and the society specifically markets VEG1 at a low price to encourage its use. Funds raised support the society's work. VEG1 has been an enormous success and it is sold not just by mail order but in bulk to the health food trade in the UK and overseas.

Several health professionals played a key role in early research of vegan nutrition and health. Dr Frey Ellis, for example, contributed regular articles to *The Vegan* and gave public lectures on plant-based nutrition and health.

## Vegan for the planet

Vegans were early proponents of what we now call environmentalism and green issues. For vegans, the lifestyle encompassed a natural way of living that respected not just sentient beings but the very planet we inhabit. These ideals were not to gain mainstream popularity for some decades after

the formation of The Vegan Society. Many vegans were involved in growing their own food, initially for wartime necessity to supplement their diets, and later for health or to ensure more naturally produced food. As early as the third issue of Vegan News in May 1945, Dugald Semple contributed an article on 'Health and the Soil':

**The question of growing health foods is of real national importance, for no nation can be well which ignores the cultivation of its soil. We are taking a long time to learn that although we have a most fertile soil we are practically a landless people. It is truly sad, all this rural depopulation, especially in view of the fact that we could be practically self supporting as a nation in our basic foodstuffs. But this would mean that we must give up our present wasteful system of raising cattle instead of growing food direct for human use.**<sup>31</sup>

In an address on veganism given to the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Vegetarian Union in 1947, Donald Watson discusses a new relationship with animals, the health aspects of the diet and how veganism would abolish food shortages throughout the world before finally considering how soil fertility can be restored:

**Further aids to soil fertility could be used in the form of peat-moss, granite dust, ground volcanic rock, composted kitchen waste, straw, leaf mould, river sludge, sea-weed, wood ash, green manuring, the growing of deep rooting plants and liming. Wonderful results are being obtained in this country both by amateurs and professionals who are using a combination of some of these fertilisers, with or without the addition of animal wastes. Thus, the use of the animal as an aid to soil fertility is optional.**<sup>32</sup>

The Vegan Society's 'statement of purpose' that appeared in the inside cover of The Vegan from 1962 includes the sentence:

**Veganism remembers man's responsibilities to**

**the earth and its resources and seeks to bring about a healthy soil and plant kingdom and a proper use of the materials of the earth.**<sup>33</sup>

Vegans had much in common with the organic gardening and horticulture movement, but a vegan gardening to bring about a healthy soil and plant kingdom required gardening without the use of animal ingredients. In 1960 The Vegan carried the first appearance of a 'Veganic' gardening column by Rosa Dalziel O'Brien. The term 'Veganic' was coined by Geoffrey L. Rudd and was derived from the first two letters of 'vegetable' and the last five letters of 'organic'.<sup>34</sup>

## Raising the standards

The creation of a trademark would appear to have been first discussed in 1986. Solicitors Dallas Brett of Oxford was retained to advise on registering a trademark for the society. At around the same time, a cosmetics company (Crescent) wrote to the society to suggest that they would like to:

**further the aims of the Vegan Society and sell these products with your approval. We suggest that the labels should simply include the Vegan logo and that a royalty of 2% NIP (net invoice price excluding VAT and postage) should be paid to the Vegan Society for its sole endorsement of this type of product.**<sup>35</sup>

A draft 'merchandising agreement' or a trademark agreement was created but it is not clear from the files whether products were licensed in this period. The society did however register a vegan trademark in class 25 – boots, shoes and slippers in April 1986.

The trademarks suggested were the society's logo used on its letterhead and magazine with waves on the letters 'V' and 'G'. The advice was that this 'V' logo needed to be distinctive and not a letter of the alphabet in order for the trademark application to be successful. In 1988, Barry Kew, secretary of the society, replied to a letter from the Dallas Brett solicitors that points out that the time for

responding to the Trade Mark Office's application is running short, that there are difficulties in finding a suitable trademark and that the society was unable to afford the cost of registering them. "In all then, and sadly, I think we'll have to let the matter rest until such time as we are able to pick up on it again or are forced into defending our use of the marks."<sup>36</sup> The trademark application with the Trade Mark Office is subsequently allowed to lapse.<sup>37</sup>

The trademark as we know it today was officially announced in a media release on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1990. "The Society is prepared to authorize the use of its trade mark on products fulfilling its 'no animal ingredients, no animal testing' criteria. Consumers will be able to buy products bearing the trade mark in the knowledge that no animal suffered during any stage of the products' development and manufacture."<sup>38</sup> The trademark artwork was created from an international sunflower design and the word 'vegan' taken from the design used on the society's stationery and magazine masthead. The sunflower was described being "internationally recognised as being associated with 'green' and vegan movements".<sup>39</sup> The Vegan Society's solicitors, Dallas Brett of Oxford undertook a lengthy process to obtain registration of the trademark. The process ultimately led to a hearing with a senior Examiner at the Patents Office in September 1991. Registration was finally achieved for 'Vegan & device' in December 1992 with the date of registration as March 1990.<sup>40</sup>

The Vegan Society adopted a Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) policy on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1998 calling for all foods that contain or may contain GMOs to be clearly labelled. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1998, The Vegan Society's council clarified the position of the policy in relation to the international Vegan Trademark:

**The development and / or production of genetically modified organisms (GMO) must not have involved animal genes or animal-derived substances. Products put forward for**

**registration which contain or may contain, any GMOs must be labelled as such.**<sup>41</sup>

The society ceased marketing the Vegan Trademark in class 29 preserved food, edible oils, prepacked meals etc. around June 1992 following a decision made by the society's council. This decision seems to have been reversed around July 1992 and the trademark went ahead and was registered.

To date, more than 18,000 products have been licensed to use the Vegan Trademark from around 500 different companies. Around 75% of the business comes from companies based outside of the UK, with Germany having the most trademark holders, followed by Italy and then Spain. The trademark has become increasingly successful in the last four years; The Vegan Society now employs six full-time staff to administer and sell the trademark, which produced a turnover of £256,000 at the end of June 2014. The society also has several agents around the world who introduce sales leads to the trademark team on a commission basis. The number of agents is set to increase over the next six to 12 months. George Gill, Head of Business Development, feels that the reason the trademark has been so successful is down to consumer demand:

**Consumers demand to know what is in their products, and part of that is cosmetics not being animal-tested. Consumers want to know more about ingredients, and the media reporting of food scares has also led people to find out more about well-being and plant based diets.**<sup>42</sup>

Gill sees the trademark going from strength to strength over the next five years:

**I expect to see mainstream products getting registered with the society. For example, branded bread that is currently described as 'vegan' will be using the Vegan Trademark.**<sup>43</sup>

## Veganism on the rise

In the early years of The Vegan Society, all the administration and other work such as investigating what vegan products were available was undertaken by members of the committee who were all volunteers. The secretary dealt with all correspondence from his or her home address and also produced the society's journal, The Vegan News (later The Vegan). The key concerns of the committee in these early years were to support members with information on which products were vegan and outreach work (mostly to ovo-lacto-vegetarians) to encourage veganism. The interest in the new society quickly grew to a level where the committee felt that the services of a full-time paid Secretary at a salary of £250 a year plus expenses was required. Treasurer G. Allan Henderson, the man responsible for suggesting the name of the society to Watson in 1944, was appointed the society's first secretary. Henderson combined the roles of treasurer and secretary. However, report of the 1950 AGM noted that the society's finances are such that it could not afford to pay officials or publish The Vegan. The society continued to rely on committee members to bear the work of the society for some years.

In the 1979 Annual Report it was announced that "Over 500 people have joined the society during the last year i.e. over 2,500 during the last 8 years compared with fewer than a thousand during the previous 27." In the same year, the society rented office premises for the first time in Oxford. Faced with high rent increases on the Oxford office the society obtained a private mortgage from member Kathleen Maxwell of £60,000 repayable over 10 years at 5% pa. This allowed the society to buy office premises and the society moved to St Leonards-on-Sea near Hastings, East Sussex. In 2007 the society relocated once again to the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham. Birmingham was chosen as the location of the society's offices because of its central location in the middle of England and lower cost of living. It was also hoped that a city would provide a more abundant

supply of office volunteers to support the society's employees.

Today, the society employs a Volunteer Development Co-ordinator and the society has some 130 Local Contacts who act as local points of contact for people wanting to know more about veganism. There are also around 500 volunteers, including school speakers, offering their skills to the society. These include a growing list of events volunteers who assist at exhibitions around the country, office volunteers who help the staff with administrative and research tasks, editorial volunteers who write for The Vegan magazine, volunteers who provide specialist skills such as photography, illustration, graphic design or IT skills, and student volunteers on placements from university. Volunteer Development Co-ordinator, Alex Douglas, is the person who welcomes all the volunteers to the society:

**Volunteers bring an extra bit of life into the society. They bring their enthusiasm and passion for the society and their role in it and that is really uplifting for the society's staff. They bring so much energy! They also enjoy meeting other vegans – an opportunity that may be limited in their lives. Volunteers also help the society make its limited resources stretch further. In April 2014 alone volunteer staff time saved the society over £1,600. This means we have more money to spend on materials and campaigns.<sup>44</sup>**

Volunteering has always been vital to the lifeblood of The Vegan Society. In his 2002 interview with George Rodger, founder Donald Watson paid handsome tribute to the society's staff and volunteers:

**All the early work was done by volunteers. In a way everyone whom the Society has ever paid to do the office work, to answer all the thousands of enquiries, that a growing movement, bursting with contacts, receives, all those people have necessarily been underpaid,**

so that, when their so-called salaries have been used, to pay their basic expenses, in a way they've all been volunteers ... Because we can afford nothing more. And we're enormously grateful to these people, because heaven knows what would happen if they all packed in, and got jobs ... in order to keep the show on the road. So, my own opinion must be to say a big "thank you", you won't be there for ever, you can't be, by the nature of the job you have. And that job, in my view, is the most important job in the world ... So the Vegan Society has always, in that sense, been supported by voluntary labour. May there always be people who apply for vacancies in the office, who are willing to make this sacrifice, even for a brief period in their careers. We're all indebted to them.<sup>45</sup>

One of the early concerns of the society was to have a good supply of plant milk available. The plant milks that were available were imported from America and the supply was clearly not adequate. The production of a British plantmilk or at least the manufacture of a plantmilk in Britain was a keen ambition of the society. This led to the formation of the Plantmilk Society on the 23rd of June 1956 to:

**promote the manufacture and sale of a satisfactory alternative to dairy or other animal milk used for human consumption, the ingredients of such alternatives to be exclusively of plant construction.**<sup>46</sup>

There were plantmilks available at this time but the intention was to produce a British plantmilk or a plantmilk at least manufactured in Britain. In 1965 Plantmilk Ltd (the company that grew out of the Plantmilk Society) commenced full-scale trading. It later changed its name to Plamil Foods Ltd, a contraction of Plantmilk.<sup>47</sup> The concern to make life easier for members also led to regular listings of information on products, described as 'vegan commodities', suitable for vegans. From almost the earliest days of the society there were plans

to produce a vegan trade list once there were enough confirmed products to justify this. The first guide to vegan commodities, The Vegan Trade List, by Christina Harvey was published by the society in 1955 priced at 1s 3d. This was a forerunner of the Cruelty Free Shopper (later editions were known as the Animal Free Shopper) which listed vegan products and was first published in 1988. The Vegan Holiday and Restaurant Guide was also published in this year.

## International veganism

The Vegan Society was the only one in the world until an American Vegan Society was founded in 1948 by Catherine Nimmo and Robin Abramowicz with help from The Vegan Society in England. A New Jersey Society was formed in 1960 by Jay Dinshah and Nimmo disbanded her society and became the first member of Dinshah's. Dinshah was raised in a lacto-vegetarian Jain family. In 1957, when he was 23, he became a vegan and joined The Vegan Society's (UK) Vegan Correspondence Bureau. His details were published in the spring 1959 issue of The Vegan: "H. Jay Dinshah ... a young man of 25, who is already doing wonderful work for veganism, and wishes, one day, to find a vegan wife!"<sup>48</sup> He was to find her in Freya Smith whose family were members of The Vegan Society. Dinshah founded the American Vegan Society in February 1960 and married Freya in August of the same year.<sup>49</sup> The Dinshahs were very proactive in their promotion of veganism and toured the United States from coast to coast as well as Canada giving talks on veganism.<sup>50</sup> They also published the first American vegan magazine, Ahimsa. Published quarterly its title is a Sanskrit word that expresses non-violence.<sup>51</sup> Freya Dinshah produced an inexpensive cookery book in 1965, the Vegan Kitchen, that was published and sold to support the American Vegan Society's work. In 1975 the US hosted the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Vegetarian Congress in Maine with Jay Dinshah as the main organiser of the Congress. Freya took charge of the catering at the event and produced a XXIII World Vegetarian

Congress Cookbook.<sup>52</sup>

Catherine Nimmo's American Vegan Society was the first of what was to become a worldwide movement of vegan societies. Germany's first vegan society was founded in the 1950s and the vegan society of India was founded in 1957. Today, The Vegan Society has loyal members and supporters worldwide and vegan products registered with the international Vegan Trademark can be found in nearly every continent.

## Spreading the message

For most of the society's existence the society's journal, *The Vegan*, has been the way it has communicated with members. It has been published quarterly since the beginning of the society in 1944 with the exception of some issues in the 1950s which were not published because of a lack of funds. At the 1960 AGM there was a committee-sponsored proposal to discontinue *The Vegan* magazine and to purchase four pages per issue in *The British Vegetarian* as a forum for its news and views. The committee's main motivation was the promotion of vegan-vegetarian unity but the financial difficulties of a few years earlier may have been a contributory factor. The decision was postponed for a year. Honorary treasurer Miss Winifred Simmons was one of:

**three voices that stood out at the AGM of 1960 against the proposal 'to discontinue *The Vegan* journal and to have 4 pages in the *British Vegetarian*'. That way would have led to the decay and extinction of the Vegan Society for it would not have had a free voice and the fact that it is flourishing and growing now is a further tribute to her wise judgement.<sup>53</sup>**

*The British Vegetarian* was the combined journal of the two national vegetarian societies of the period the North West based Vegetarian Society and the London Vegetarian Society. The two organisations combined resources to share a journal but retained separate memberships, administration and finances. In 1969, these two

charities merged completely to become The Vegetarian Society of the United Kingdom that we know today. If The Vegan Society had taken the opportunity to combine its journal with the vegetarian societies' journals in 1960 – and having some space to share their news and views in the *Vegetarian Messenger* was the ambition of the non-dairy vegans in 1943/44 – it seems possible that it may also have combined forces with the vegetarian organisations in 1969. This may have led, as the president of The Vegan Society, Jack Sanderson, feared, to decay and extinction but it is also possible that the vegan message may have played a greater part in the (ovo-lacto) vegetarian movement and that The Vegetarian Society may have promoted a vegan diet under the banner of the word 'vegetarian' – returning the word to its earliest use where it meant an ethical vegan diet. A narrow escape or a missed opportunity? We shall never know. On the occasion of the merging of the two charities, The Vegan Society sent an illuminated manuscript congratulating The Vegetarian Society and the London Vegetarian Society on their decision to combine forces and The Vegan Society's committee clearly saw the working together of these organisations as a good thing for the movement.

One of the key moments in the society's history was when the word 'vegan' was included in the Oxford English Dictionary Supplement IV in 1986. The definition was given as "[a] person who on principle abstains from all food of animal origin: a strict vegetarian." Donald Watson is credited in the *Vegan News* in November 1944 as being the first person to use the word in a published source. For vegans in the period the word being included in the Oxford English Dictionary was a sign of veganism's establishment in society. It was a symbol of the diet being recognised and of veganism coming in from the cold.

One of the key highlights in the society's history was the invitation in late 1975 to contribute to [the Society was invited to contribute a film to the series rather than to contribute to a film

the BBC was making as part of a series. Open Door was community broadcasting rather than a BBC documentary film series, [As such I think the control rested with the Society] a film about veganism to the BBC's Open Door series of community broadcast programmes. The film, called *A Better Future for All Life*, was broadcast on 31<sup>st</sup> January (repeated 7 February) 1976. It was presented by Erica Cook, a New Zealand vegan, and included interviews with president Dr Frey Ellis, deputy president Mr Jack Sanderson, researcher Tom Sanders, vice-president Mrs Eva Batt, Mrs Serena Coles and Mrs Kathleen Jannaway (who would later found the Movement for Compassionate Living), the Bray and Bland families, and Harry Bonnie. Following the broadcast and in the following three weeks, the society received 300 phone calls. The post office had to deliver the postbag by van, and send a van for the replies, after nearly 9,000 letters were received (the society had hoped for 100 perhaps 1,000 letters at most).<sup>54</sup>

The Open Door programme was felt to be such a success that the society used to show the film to groups for many years afterwards as part of its outreach work. Ultimately, it became quite dated and unsuitable for use and the need for a new film that could be distributed on video to groups was discussed. However, it wasn't until the society's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1994 that the society had a new film to offer the public. Louise Wallis, the president of The Vegan Society, launched a Vegan Video Fund. A new video, *Truth or Dairy*, was launched to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the society. It was the first film of the now award-winning director Fanny Armstrong, who would later go on to make the documentary *McLibel* and the acclaimed *The Age of Stupid*. Franny and her sister Boo were friends with Louise Wallis, and they volunteered their services because their father worked in TV and allowed them to use his equipment. Louise, fellow trustee of the society Frank Hudson, Franny, and Boo had no prior film-making experience but produced a video that

was ground-breaking in its use of humour and its approach to the topic.

There was also another event to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the society: the first World Vegan Day, held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1994. This was later extended to become World Vegan Week and as we now know it, World Vegan Month, in November. The date was chosen by Louise Wallis because the society was founded in November but the exact date of the founding meeting was unknown.

More recently, The Vegan Society has undergone a change in its visual identity. The new charity branding has kept the traditional sunflower symbol in a more modern form of the logo, and incorporates energetic colours, fonts, and images. The society's international Vegan Trademark, which the society licenses to appear on vegan products, remains unchanged and in use alongside the new brand.

The advent of the internet changed the way that all charities communicate with their members and supporters. Twentieth century organisations like The Vegan Society required a number of people to meet up physically to make decisions. A number of people would be required to administer those decisions and membership funds would need to be raised to pay for the printing and postage of a journal, newsletter or other publicity materials. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an organisation can be founded, administered and promoted by one person, without members ever requiring to meet face-to-face, and with little expenditure. This has led to a fragmentation of how vegans and transitioning vegans obtain information about the vegan lifestyle. They no longer need to contact the world's only vegan organisation by post and wait for a typed reply. Any query about veganism can be answered by many thousands of web pages on the internet. Moreover, questions, queries and appeals for support can be met on internet discussion groups and social media groups. The quality of the information on offer may vary, but with so much information available, the role of the



society in the provision of information has been largely reduced to pointing vegans in the direction of good quality resources or support.

## The next 70 years

What does the future hold for The Vegan Society? The world has changed greatly in the last 70 years. The way in which organisations like The Vegan Society communicate their messages has also changed, with the advent of the internet and social media. Yet, the message itself remained unchanged across the decades. As we have seen, much of the work of the society in the past has been about providing information to individual vegans and would-be vegans and about working to share information on how to be vegan through its trade lists and vegan guides, as well as assisting with the development of new foods for vegans such as plantmilk. Showing individuals how to be vegan was the key task of past decades. This information is readily available today to anyone with access to a computer and the internet, wherever they are in the world. There are many peer networks that can offer the support that once Donald Watson had to supply all on his own.

So what is the society's role? In a nutshell, the society sees its role changing into one that influences policy makers, retailers, manufacturers, health professionals and other organisations to create a world in which veganism can truly flourish. The society plans to engage with MPs in the run-up to the general election in 2015. The society is also working with the Hospital Caterers Association to improve the catering for vegans in hospitals, and is also working with the BDA, the Association of UK Dietitians. Vegan Society CEO, Jasmijn de Boo notes:

**In the past more attention was given to working with individuals and influencing their ideas about animals, the environment, human justice etc. but now we plan to spend more**

**resources on working with opinion formers and organisations that can help to make it easier for people to become and stay vegan. Changing policies and practices to make the environment more vegan-friendly and changing perceptions in wider society takes longer, but is more sustainable and effective than just reaching those who are already vegan. Our philosophy has not changed at all. But we need to support people on their journey to becoming vegan and that means making it easier for them to be vegan such as making sure that there are vegan options when they eat out. We also need to work with other organisations and partners in the UK and internationally to promote a united positive vegan front.<sup>55</sup>**

It seems appropriate to conclude with a final quotation from Donald Watson at the time of the society's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004:

**It is a profound thought that so much can be achieved toward health and peace simply by placing man in his true place in nature which is not as a carnivore nor as a parasite. We can now offer, after long experience, a lifestyle that is humane, healthy, aesthetic, pleasant, economical and sustainable. No other movement offers all these together or indeed separately. Humbly we take our place in history among the world's great reformers.<sup>56</sup>**

On behalf of The Vegan Society I'd like to thank Dr Samantha Calvert for her excellent research that has enabled us to publish this historical record.

Jasmijn de Boo,  
Donald Watson House,  
October 31<sup>st</sup> 2014

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